



**(U) Early Daze at the Agency**

FROM: A Staffer Who (Understandably) Wishes To Remain Anonymous  
Unknown

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(U) For some of us, it's been quite a while since we walked through the gatehouse for the first time and were exposed to a strange new language: NSA jargon. Sometimes this process unfolds gradually, as you pick up a bit of terminology here and there. At other times, there are spikes of enlightenment...

(C) In preparation for my first job at the Agency, I was sent to a class on transcription. This class involved listening to various foreign language conversations on reel-to-reel tapes and writing down what was said. When I was handed some tapes, I noticed that "SECRET SPOKE" was stamped on them in bold lettering. "Hmm," I thought, "that must mean the conversations are secret, but why do they say 'SPOKE' instead of 'SPOKEN'? And if I write them down, do I have to change the classification to 'SECRET WRITTEN, er.. WROTE'?"

(U//FOUO) Fast forward a few months. By now I was settled into my first office and knew everything... almost. My deputy branch chief swung by my desk one day to report that he had attended a division meeting in which he'd learned that the watch was a little shorthanded. "But don't worry, I don't think you'll be drafted," he said before disappearing. To me, this was a non-sequitur. Drafted? Was there some fine print saying that when you are hired by the DOD that you become eligible for a military draft?? My team chief set me straight.

(U) A final anecdote. Not long after, the same deputy branch chief mentioned to me that he thought I had a pretty good chance of being promoted, maybe next year. "Holy cow!" I thought. Promoted! As in, I'm going to be bossing people around only 18 months after setting foot inside the building? Again, my team chief came to the rescue: think of it as a raise.

*(U//FOUO) Note: The term "SPOKE" was a COMINT codeword and didn't signify in any way that the material was oral. See [a related memo](#) phasing out this and other codewords. Also, being "drafted" meant that one was asked to work shiftwork in a watch operation.*

(U) Did you have any misunderstandings when you were a new hire? Tell us your story-- send an email to [REDACTED] (for NT) or [REDACTED]@nsa (Sun).

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